

An End to the Violence

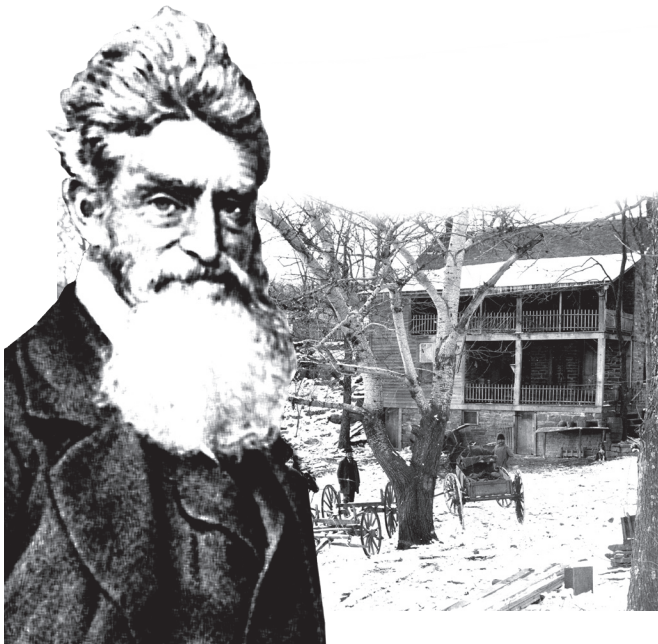
The Marais des Cygnes Massacre was one of the most violent incidents in Kansas Territory fueled by the issue of slavery. By this time, the antislavery forces had gained control of the political process in Kansas. Nineteen months after the massacre the governor signed an act that prohibited slavery in Kansas Territory.

The Hadsall House

A few weeks after the massacre, John Brown arrived at this location and constructed a fortified house that he and a few other men occupied through the summer. One of Brown's friends, Charles C. Hadsall, bought the property and later built a stone home near the Brown house, which no longer stands.

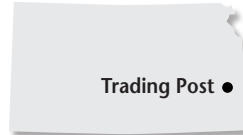
Kansas Statehood

Kansas joined the United States on January 29, 1861, as a free state. Kansas became the 34th state in the Union. The state motto became "To the stars through difficulty."



Recent History of the Site

In 1941 the Kansas Legislature authorized acceptance of the massacre site, including the Hadsall House, as a gift to the state from the Pleasanton Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars. In 1961 it provided funds for the restoration of the building, and in 1963 the entire property was turned over to the Kansas Historical Society for administration.



Four miles northeast of
Trading Post via K-52 East
and follow signs.

Mailing Address:
20485 Kansas Hwy. 52
Pleasanton KS 66075-9549



Marais des Cygnes Massacre State Historic Site



REAL PEOPLE. REAL STORIES.



Marais des Cygnes Massacre State Historic Site
Near Trading Post
913-352-8890
kshs.org/places/marais

Nestled into the wooded hills of southeast Kansas, the Marais des Cygnes Massacre State Historic Site is operated by the Kansas Historical Society. We ask you to help us and the people of Linn County preserve the solemnity of the site as you tour it and enjoy the picnic areas. As you do, please consider the history of one of the most violent incidents from Kansas' territorial days.

A Nation at Odds

The mid 1800s were a time of turmoil and tragedy in the U.S. The issue of slavery polarized the nation. It created a moral, political, and economic dilemma. The struggle over slavery ultimately led to the Civil War, splitting the Northern and the Southern states.

Tension in Kansas Territory

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 created Kansas Territory. The voters of the territory would decide if it would be a free or slave state. The state of Missouri lies 1,200 feet east of this site. Missouri permitted slavery and wanted Kansas to do the same. Both antislavery and proslavery settlers flooded into Kansas Territory to determine its destiny.

Bleeding Kansas

The fight over slavery in Kansas Territory erupted into violence. At least 50 people lost their lives during the territorial period. Many more were injured or lost property. National attention was focused on the violent confrontations, giving rise to the name "Bleeding Kansas."

John Brown of Kansas

Abolitionist John Brown emerged as a national figure while in Kansas Territory. He was willing to use violence to end the shame of slavery. Brown led a group of antislavery men on a raid, which resulted in the killing of five proslavery men. Known as the Pottawatomie Massacre, this event led to further guerrilla warfare. John Brown continued to attack

proslavery farms in Missouri taking property and freeing slaves through the Underground Railroad.

Prelude to the Massacre

On the morning of May 19, 1858, a group of 20 to 30 proslavery men arrived on horseback at Trading Post, located three miles southwest of here. Charles Hamilton, who had been forced out of the territory by antislavery forces, led the group. Some think Hamilton was looking to settle an old score; others say he was looking for any freestaters he could find.

The Marais des Cygnes Massacre

Between Trading Post and here, Hamilton's group captured 11 unarmed antislavery men. They were forced to march toward the border. When they reached this point, the captives were lined up in the ravine. From the ledge overlooking the ravine, Hamilton gave the order to fire. The victims fell. Hamilton dismounted his horse to finish the job. Five men died from their wounds, five others were injured, and one survived unharmed by pretending to be dead. Those captured were:

John F. Campbell, died
William Colpetzer, died
Michael Robinson, died
Patrick Ross, died
William Stillwell, died
William Hairgrove, wounded
Asa Hairgrove, wounded
Amos Hall, wounded
Rev. Benjamin Reed, wounded

Charles Snyder, wounded

Austin Hall, unhurt

A Wife's Pursuit

Sarah Read learned that her husband, the Reverend B. L. Read, had been captured. She bravely followed the trail of the men nearly two miles when she heard gunshots. She soon encountered some of Hamilton's men and demanded to know what they did with her husband. Eventually she discovered the victims in the ravine. Her wounded husband implored her to get help. She returned with the wives of two other victims to administer aid.

A Nation's Reaction

The Marais des Cygnes Massacre gained national attention. The *New York Times* and other eastern newspapers printed the story. The antislavery supporters considered the victims martyrs. Four months after the shootings, noted poet John Greenleaf Whittier memorialized the event in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Even some proslavery editors decried the event as a disgrace. The massacre increased tensions nationwide.

"Such cowardly proceedings as these are a disgrace to a civilized country, and only in keeping with the characters of fiends and monsters."

— *Kansas Weekly Herald*, Leavenworth proslavery newspaper

